

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. (Gal 6:2)

There is a very clever bit of sophistry in the world today that seeks to create confusion about what it is to be Christian. It attacks one of the fundamental tenets of our preaching – that obedience is a necessary thing.

The argument goes a little like this – that since no man can actually obey the law in its entirety, then we shouldn't demand it from people. God's grace is free so we don't have any right to exact payment for it.

James tells us

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” (Jas 2:10)

So since there is no possible way not to offend in a single point of the law because we are born into original sin, everyone is doomed to failure, so don't make them feel bad about not being able to achieve the impossible.

After all, Christ's blood is what saves, the argument continues, not obedience to the law, otherwise the blood of bulls and goats would have been enough to save, and as we know

“...it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.” (Heb 10:4)

Therefore the message to the world should simply be to “believe on the Lord Jesus” and not impose obedience to a law even we cannot obey. After all, was this not settled by Paul with the Philippian jailer:

*“Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, **Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.** And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.” (Act 16:30-32)*

So just tell people to believe, doggone it, and all will be well and their souls will be cleansed by the miraculous cleansing blood of Christ and His redemptive power will bring His sheep home! That's all you have to do to be a preacher, is tell people to believe!

There are variations on this argument, but it gets repetitive pretty quick. Depending on what flavor of so-called Christianity is making it to you and how deeply into their will-worship they dive, there are niceties and nuances to this that deny sinfulness after

confession of Christ, that preach inclusion of all manner of vile sins into the body (because, after all, Christ hung out with prostitutes and tax collectors, don't you know). It all boils down to denying any standards that you find written plainly in Scripture.

This is how you end up with divorce and remarriage being rampant in the so-called church, you end up with an actual debate over whether homosexuality is a sin, when it is clearly called an abomination, you end up with churches arguing that it's okay to kill unborn babes in the womb, etc. This is how you end up with the supposed Vicar of Christ saying civil unions are okay, when Christ (who this Vicar says is His boss) plainly said

"...Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" (Mat 19:4-5)

Hear me very clearly – I am not for one second suggesting that there is some action a person can take to save **themselves**. That isn't what Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer, either.

We can't dilly dally around about this and hope to be called good and faithful servants. There is an obligation to preach as much of the Gospel as we have understanding of to as many as we possibly can. How could we preach the Gospel without demanding, for Christ's righteousness' sake, that people claiming to be His followers strive to obey Him? I don't believe that we can.

Examine this passage with me for a bit:

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." (Rom 10:13-21)

This is a glorious treatise of how we ought to look at this, and I'm going to dissect this a little bit in the hopes that it makes clear the importance of preaching obedience.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Now, this is the crux of the matter. Should we just be telling people "call upon the Lord's name and you'll be good, no matter what"? To me, that seems a pretty obvious 'no', but you'd be hard-pressed to know that listening to the everyday preacher out there, despite these pretty clear words from the Master Himself:

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Mat 7:21-23)

So, not everyone that calls unto Him will be saved, then? No, they will not! Because this clearly tells us that it isn't just some generic calling out "Lord", or even acknowledging that Christ is the Son of God in some general sort of way. There is more to it than that!

"...depart from me, ye that work iniquity" lays out what more it is. Those who call on Him and OBEY, them He knows, and He saves. He provides to them that impetus to obey and cease working iniquity. It is salvation by grace, not works, and the obedience we remind people of is one of the key signs of that grace. There is still a dire need to call to obedience and repentance, not just to tell people to rotely call on His name. Look at the argument they will make to Him – not only that they called on Him, but that they prophesied in His name, that they cast out devils in His name, that they did many wonderful works! They did a lot of things that looked holy and righteous all in His name.

But they did all those things while clinging to their disobedience, working iniquity while they claimed to be one of His and call on Him. Friends, if that doesn't put a little scare into your soul, I don't know what will. This should have every person who claims to be a Christian on their knees seeking His help to obey Him today, knowing that this day our soul could be required of us. Just because you sincerely think you're worshiping God doesn't mean you are, and you have an obligation to seek out what the requirements truly are.

As further evidence of this point, listen to what the King says in another place:

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom

he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.” (Luk 6:46-49)

You aren't genuinely calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ if you aren't doing the things He says. If you aren't doing those things that He has commanded – that is, obeying – you have built your house upon the sand and will be swept away in the Day of Judgment. That's some scary stuff right there. It ought to give everyone calling themselves Christian pause when they take that title to themselves – am I doing that which He has said?

One thing I find so interesting in this passage in Romans is that Paul is quoting from Joel. This isn't some idea or phrase that is new or unique to Paul's testimony and writings. Here's where we find the language originally:

“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.” (Joe 2:32)

This is a front and center idea in the prophecies of Joel, which of course are largely eschatological, so this definitely points to the end days, but it has application now, as Paul shows. Those who seek obedience to Him and call upon Him for believing deliverance will be brought through those trials in the Day of the Lord. Those who honor Him with their lips only will not. Those walking in obedience today will receive that same deliverance.

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?

There's the critical question – how can one call on the name of Christ if you don't believe in Him? Why would you do it?

This belief isn't the same word as faith, but it is closely related to it and it carries with it the same import. This word believed is Strong's 4100, *pisteuō* which according to Thayer's means “to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, place confidence in”. The word frequently translated faith is 4102, *pistis*, meaning according to Thayer's “conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the NT of a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervour born of faith and joined with it”.

They are words from the same meaning tree. What is being described here is a belief that is not an academic or simple acknowledgement of existence, or a belief that is founded in animosity and hatred. I've made this point before, and the distinction is well applicable to this discussion – the devils believe there is one God:

“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” (Jas 2:19)

They believe AND tremble, but that will not save them. It would be absurd to say that their kind of belief is what is being commanded, wouldn't you say? So belief has to be much more than just begrudgingly acknowledging Christ is the Son of God, or trying to undermine and undo His righteous works while on the face of things admitting His deity.

It is precisely that kind of sterile, just-a-fact belief these so-called Christians say is the sum total of what is needed to be saved. Just a cursory, 'yep, there He is, for sure' kind of acknowledgement. It is a subtle manipulation of the words that sets a trap.

The devils have a first-hand understanding of who Christ is, what His power is and how things are ultimately going to end up for them on the Judgement Day. They openly acknowledge His power, as we can see here:

“And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” (Mat 8:28-29)

In this simple event, you see many things about these devils. They acknowledged who Christ was, demonstrating their belief in the Son of God. They acknowledged His power and glory. They called His name, even. But this is not the saving belief of which Paul speaks, and which we preach! The devils will not be saved by this belief and neither will these lukewarm (at best) Christians!

So we're talking about some deeper, more connected thing, not a superficial belief. That belief cannot exist except the believer have heard of that thing in which they are supposed to believe.

and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

Implicit in this is that the thing which is preached, is preached faithfully. That it is preached with the goal of enlightening those who will hear and who will believe.

Being a preacher isn't about accolades, or gaining something for yourself. It isn't a vocation intended to put food on the table and pay for your kids' college education. It shouldn't be providing you a private jet and a closet shelf full of Rolexes. If your preaching is doing any of those things, you should be taking a good hard look at yourself.

The point of preaching is to make certain the words are out there, published and available. All the words. Not part of the message, not just the happy feel-good parts. Not a milquetoast, undisciplined message of 'Christ's blood redeems' – that doesn't discern the body of our Lord! It doesn't teach those who haven't heard of the righteousness of God and why His blood is needed to wash away sins.

If your preaching doesn't contain both halves, as it were, of the message, you do a grave disservice to the Holy Ghost and what He has preserved for us in the book to preach; the short version of which is that you must believe AND obey! Those two things go tightly hand-in-hand. They are inseparable parts of the same Gospel!

And here's the comfort of the saints – by the grace of God, His people are given the faith and power to do both! The work of redemption wasn't undertaken as some vanity, where our God is powerless to save all mankind and preserve all from hell if He so chose! NO! He chose NOT to preserve all mankind from hell. His work of redemption was selective, intentional, specific and directed! He wrote the names in the book with His own hand, and then did the work necessary in the covenant to accomplish the purpose of redeeming those souls for whom He was (and is) the kinsman redeemer!

Don't talk about the redemptive work of Christ if you aren't going to talk about it truthfully, fully and with an explicit declaration of its application! Don't call yourself a preacher if you're not going to do that work properly, because your efforts are then in vain, and you are a deceiver, a wolf in sheep's clothing, telling only half truths at best.

In other words, if you aren't telling the whole story, you are not SENT!

Why are preachers sent? Why not just imprint all this on the hearts of men and let them live out their lives in the sure knowledge of their redemption or damnation. Why not show it in the clouds, or have the stones cry out?

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” (1Co 1:21)

He sends His preachers because it pleases Him to do so. Those who claim to have that calling and have any understanding would do well to put their hand to it properly and with diligence, faith and zeal. They should keep to His word and not add their own

wisdom, because the wisdom of the world doesn't know the first thing about God. Look at this language quoted from Isaiah 52, that the feet of those who do this work – yes, the smelly, gnarled feet – are beautiful! Those that walk, run, leap to deliver the tidings that not all men are doomed to an eternal damnation – those feet are beautiful! By implication, those who do not do that work faithfully are feet that lead men to doom – those feet are ugly, false things, motoring about men of corrupt minds who are destitute of the truth in crooked, wide ways that lead to destruction!

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

Yes, they have not all obeyed the gospel indeed. Here is the rub. You can't have the truth, you can't have preaching, without the preaching of obedience. Isaiah rightly asks "who hath believed our report", because our report isn't just some simplistic gift store coffee mug reading "Christ Crucified". The report was, is and ever shall be that obedience to God is mandatory! It is an indicator of salvation, an evidence of faith! The report is that God sent His Son to redeem those whom He has adopted into faith, not all of mankind. That is why the report isn't believed, because it doesn't sit well with those who have not been called!

Why wouldn't someone believe the report if all the report contained was "some redemption for you, and some for you, and a little redemptive work of Christ over there, put a little here, a dollop of God loves you there", etc. What kind of maudlin pabulum would that preaching be, and why would it be necessary? If the natural order of things under God is that Christ redeemed all and there is no need of obedience, then there is nothing necessary to hear!

The preaching of obedience coincides with the preaching of Christ because obedience, specifically obedience to Christ's "new commandment" is antithetical to the natural behavior of men.

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." (Joh 13:34)

This is not new in the sense that it had never been uttered, as indeed this concept was part of the law of Moses:

"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD." (Lev 19:18)

And we know that James commends to and quotes this very language:

"If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well." (Jas 2:8)

Why is it called a new commandment, given it is discussed in the Mosaic Code? First, it is explicitly emphasized by Christ. He calls it new to single out the need and draw attention to it by laying it out as a specific commandment. The Jews had done such disservice to the law, that the rule of the day was that of vengeance and retribution. That required a special calling out to come away from that behavior and serves as an exhortation for us to keep away from such behaviors.

Second, it can be called new in that it was renewed by Him as a final admonition or instruction to His followers. Think of all the things that could have been said at this stage in His ministry, and this is what He focused on. Against our depraved nature, selfishness must be put aside and true abiding love for others should abound in our hearts. Love toward the world that hates us, love toward the brethren with whom we abide, love toward the God who created us.

Finally, it is new in that He has shifted the emphasis. In Leviticus it is admonished to love our neighbors as ourselves, but here to love one another as Christ has loved us – which is far greater love. That love is without payment, without cause and without hesitation.

This obedience to love is not a thing that we can simply achieve through skillful determination or taking a pill. Listen to what John tells us:

“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” (1Jn 3:23-24)

There are a few specific points worth mentioning here:

1. We are commanded to believe. This isn't an invitation to some optional bonus event. “And this is his commandment...” not His enduring wish, His desire, His gentle persuasion. It is His commandment. We are commanded to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and we are given ample evidence of that as fact to cause that belief to occur. So on its face, telling a person to believe on Jesus is a call to obedience. You can't separate the two things – belief **is** obedience.
2. I and others have said this many times, but believing is a full belief. Not an academic exercise, but heart-felt consuming belief. It is specifically, among other things:
 - discerning the Lord's body and believing it is the propitiation for the sins of His people, showing it the proper reverence
 - unwavering belief that He was raised from the dead and will raise His own to everlasting life

- acknowledging in action as well as word His sovereignty and ordaining of all things
- submitting to His afflicting hand when it comes upon us
- full belief that the only way to salvation is through His blood, not our own works
- believing His words, all of them, in their entirety
- acknowledging His holiness and righteousness
- having no other gods before Him, including the lusts of our own flesh
- acknowledging His Kingship and seeking to serve Him
- recognizing and being thankful for His adoption of us
- believing He is the author and finisher of our faith. This is how it looks to express this kind of belief, by the way:

“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” (2Ti 1:12)

“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” (Job 19:25-27)

3. We know this obedience by its fruits – the Spirit working in us to make those fruits evident, to cause us to pursue them, to desire them, and to put off the selfishness of the old man to truly love and keep this commandment is evident both in its presence and its absence in other humans.
4. Believing is indisputably tied to obedience as John shows us here. He was there when the commandment was given, and he’s tying these things together for us for a reason. You can’t have the one without the other, and speaking of either of these independently is a pointless exercise.

And here is strongest argument for preaching and exhorting to obedience – *“he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him”*. This is the piece of this that really leaves me scratching my head how anyone can argue against preaching obedience. John here is simply reiterating what Christ Himself has said. Just look at the words!

“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Mat 5:19)

“And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Mat 19:17)

“If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (Joh 14:15)

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.” (Joh 14:21-24)

“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.” (Joh 15:9-10)

Christ clearly isn't talking about some ceremonial type or shadow commandment that pointed to His coming. He's talking about the moral law as He always did when discussing obedience to the commandments. He is referencing His 'new commandment' explicitly – just look at the context and read the words!

We are surrounded by wolves, indeed ravening wolves. They nip and pick at us over our admonitions. They sometimes come into our midst and try to throw us off our course and our defense of the gospel with a multitude of words. They want to redefine what the gospel is to make us question whether we are preaching it faithfully and thereby throw us off course.

We are set, by the grace of God as Paul was, for the defense of this gospel though. We are not ignorant of these devices, either. We will keep to the words, and the words speak through and through, cover to cover, of the need to obey. We will continue to seek to obey and exhort to it. As the Preacher says

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” (Ecc 12:13)

Exhorting to obedience is not inconsistent with the message to 'believe on the Lord Jesus'. It is the **same** message, and we must not forget or abandon that regardless of what the world thinks of it.